

WRITINGS FROM ADULT LEARNERS OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

inSight





I can change only one and that someone is me.

PATRICIA B., ACADEMY OF HOPE

About Writers & Readers...

The **Claude Brown Writers & Readers Series**, sponsored by the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE), Adult and Family Education, introduces adult learners in the District of Columbia to published writers in a moderated discussion of reading, writing, and self-expression. The Series is named after Claude Brown, author of *Manchild in the Promised Land*, to honor Mr. Brown's participation as a guest in the Series in 2002 before

he passed. *Manchild in the Promised Land*, published in 1965, was praised for its portrayal of Harlem and as a fictionalized memoir of Mr. Brown's ascent from a childhood of poverty and crime to a college bound path. This unique learning experience, part of the OSSE's vision that every District resident will receive an excellent education, takes place at Busboys & Poets in the historic U Street corridor of Washington, D.C.



How the WORLD sees Me

They think they know me
but I am a person who fears the darkness,
who fears scorpions,
who sneaks, but also thanks God.
In D.C., we don't have scorpions.

—KELLY R. | ACADEMY OF HOPE

People think they know me. But they don't.

I am brave and I fight for those who have no voice.

I stand for those who are dismissed.

I stand surefooted and proud of myself.

I am a community and global indigenous activist.

—LOUISE T. | ACADEMY OF HOPE

*They think they know me. I am the one who wears heels,
make up, and dresses to try to fit my outer appearance into the
expectation of beauty. It may seem like I think I look good
on the outside, but in my mind it's a totally different feeling.*

Little whispers scream at me in a loud, angry, annoying manner. Why did you wear red?

That is not your color. I told you a thousand times, smile when you greet. It's more friendly.

Oh no, no, no, no don't speak your slang. It don't make sense and scares people away.

That's just a small portion of what runs in my mind day after day after day. But should I
even care about what they think or say.

It's my life! I should be free! Yeah, it should be all about me. Oh no, no. I'm pushing it.

Of course it matters what they think.

Who is this they I am speaking of?

Everyone, I guess.

Everyone but me.

—JAZELLE H. | NOTRE DAME EDUCATION CENTER





They think they know me, but I am impatient
 Never to get where I am going
 Speeding too fast, not knowing I'll soon get there
 Eager, yet moving too fast will get me nowhere
 Driving in a 1984 Chevy but moving in a 2000 'Vette.
 When will I ever learn, especially when my car breaks down,
 patience is a virtue.

—TERRY M. | D.C. DEPARTMENT OF EMPLOYMENT
 SERVICES, PROJECT EMPOWERMENT

They think they know me, but I am
 anxious and ambitious. I know I'm doing a marvelous job. I know
 patience is a virtue if I let it flow. Anyway, I'll try to keep my passions
 and desires in the bounds of moderation, so I can continue to reach
 and empower.

—ANDREW S. | D.C. DEPARTMENT OF EMPLOYMENT
 SERVICES, PROJECT EMPOWERMENT



How I see myself

The night cracked with the energy of my people at the opening of the American Indian Museum. Oh, I smelled my people, the sweat of my people. The energy was making us all drunk. Our joy popped and cracked as we danced. As the hoop dancer came I heard all our whoops. His deep chest poked out with pride. Covering the air was the smell of turkey, three sisters, and frybread. This is our time.

—LOUISE T. | ACADEMY OF HOPE

They think they know me, but I am brave.

They think they know me; I am lonely.

They think they know me; I am confident.

They think they know me; I am dependable.

They think they know me; I am calm.

They think they know me; I am peaceful.

—RUDOLPH J. | D.C. DEPARTMENT OF EMPLOYMENT
SERVICES, PROJECT EMPOWERMENT

*They think they know me...
but I am one with low self esteem.
As time goes on, I'll learn to love me for me.*

They think they know me...
but I am one who needs the help of others to get motivated.
With their help I'll learn their strength, hope and faith.

They think they know me...
but I am a caring and loving individual who helps others.
Especially when they cannot help themselves.

They think they know me...
but I am one who has been struggling with addictions
for 28 years of my life.
With recovery I've learned to take it one day at a time.

They think they know me but I am who I am,
A recovering addict living life on life's terms
to the best of my ability, striving.

—CONSTANCE S. | D.C. DEPARTMENT OF EMPLOYMENT
SERVICES, PROJECT EMPOWERMENT

They think they know me, but I am forgiving.
Hurt in so many ways, down, up, sideways, and in between.
But all is forgiven.
One of the best lessons I have learned in life
is that I cannot change another. But all is forgiven.
I can change only one and that someone is me.
All is forgiven.

—PATRICIA B. | ACADEMY OF HOPE

They think they know me, but I am
Sensitive to the feelings of others in how you feel
and in what you feel,
Sensitive to the way you wear your hair
and about your flair,
Sensitive to the way that you walk
and the way that you talk,
Sensitive to the way a child feels.

—SELESTINE E. | ACADEMY OF HOPE



They think they know me but I am one

Who fears not accomplishing my goals,

Who fears expressing myself and the beauty trapped inside myself,

Who fears achieving outside what I have already achieved inside my mind,

Who fears conquering those ideals that I have already conquered
inside my inner world.

I hope someday to come out to the world that is waiting for me to share
what we have in common and what we have that is wonderful.

—MARIBEL G. | ACADEMY OF HOPE

They do know me; I am kind. I like being kind. It's a wonderful feeling.
Some people are angry, for whatever reason. Just this morning I spoke
to a young lady but she looked at me and kept on walking. I felt sad but
kept my head up high and kept on walking. I saw another person and
spoke to him and he spoke back to me with pleasure. That made my
day. That's why I like being kind. Something good always comes out
of being kind.

—SERENA H. | NOTRE DAME EDUCATION CENTER



They think they know me, but I am strong.
I am not only strong, but also afraid.
Afraid of life and the changes it brings me.
I am strong for my daughter and my unborn child.
I am afraid of being a monster in my daughter's eyes.
But strong enough to stand up to her.

—CORNELIA S. | ACADEMY OF HOPE

I am an island

where I walk on the white sand.

The ocean smells such that I want to eat fish.

But I imagine a blue whale

that may swallow me.

I collect small rocks, shells and

I look at the sky.

I stop and think I hear the sound of the waves.

—KELLY R. | ACADEMY OF HOPE

They think they know me, but I am lonely.

I am as alone as I can be.

No one to love me, but yet I am still me.

I have no one to cuddle with.

No one to say I love you except just my family,

but that's okay because I am me. I am as lonely as lonely can be,

but no matter, because what I am is me.

Even though I am lonely, I have God to be with me.

—MARY C. | ACADEMY OF HOPE





*I am brave and I fight for those who have no voice.
I stand for those who are dismissed.
I stand surefooted and proud of myself.*

LOUISE T., ACADEMY OF HOPE

They think they know me, but I am sensitive. I can feel the temperament of different people because I can feel tones of the voice. I am sensitive because I can feel the bad and good energy of others.

—ALEXANDER M. | CARLOS ROSARIO
PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL



They think they know me but I am suspicious. The love I had is gone. The only one I knew as a child left with people who didn't know me, or care about my feelings. Almost everyone is suspect, good bye grandma! I am suspicious.

—MARIA J. | OPPORTUNITIES INDUSTRIALIZATION CENTER



What is LOVE

Love is sweet as Grandma's iced tea.

Love is deep as a soldier's wounds.

Love is the joy of a new baby boy.

Love is hot as a J.Z. CD.

Love is cold as a killer's soul.

Love is me.

—ADRIANE H. | ACADEMY OF HOPE

Love is painful, hurtful, dishonest.

Love is spiteful and untrue.

Love is dumb and stupid.

Love is a crying pain that burns inside.

Love is a waste of time.

Love don't exist.

—ANNA R. | ARCH



Love is great.

Love makes you want to participate.

Love is foolish.

Love is something that makes you clueless.

Love is pain.

Love is something I can't explain.

Love is emotions.

Love is like a potion that cannot be replaced.

Love is love.

—CANESHIA C. | MARSHALL HEIGHTS COMMUNITY
DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATION

Love is grandma's cooking.

Love is those chocolate chip cookies.

Love is how she made the kitchen smell.

Love is that Sunday dinner.

Love is all these pound cakes.

Love is just loving grandmom.

—MICHAEL C. |
ACADEMY OF HOPE

Love is loving yourself.

Love is being happy with someone.

Love is loving life, and our surroundings.

Love is being alive.

Love is loving your kids.

Love is being yourself.

Love is a breath of fresh air.

Love is love.

—SHAMELIA P. |
VIRTUAL ENTERPRISE



Love is having someone to hold you.

Love is a sweet kiss hello or goodbye.

Love is a call everyday to see how you are.

Love is a precious memory when he's gone.

Love is having your uncle around to say I love you.

Love is watching and crying as he slowly dies.

Love is saying your final goodbye.

—MARY C. | ACADEMY OF HOPE

Love is working.

Love is the job.

Love is living.

Love is God.

Love is playing at the new baseball stadium.

Love is watching my daughter run.

—REGINALD L. | ACADEMY OF HOPE/LITERACY
VOLUNTEERS & ADVOCATES, WORKPLACE LITERACY

Love is: my family, my people, God, and life.

Love is: my job, my car, my house, my kids and my wife.

Love is: the trees, the ocean, the wind, and the rain.

Love is: heartache, sadness, anger, stress, and pain.

Love is: dedication, emotion, determination, and support.

Love is: a complete thought.

—EARL R. | MARSHALL HEIGHTS COMMUNITY
DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATION

Love is my joy.

Love is pleasure and satisfaction.

Love is my Lord.

Love is my achievement.

Love is hard work.

What a joy when love is derived from your own efforts.

—MARY B. | VIRTUAL ENTERPRISE



Love is my family, my people, God, and life.

EARL R., MARSHALL HEIGHTS COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATION



Love is God... He holds me together.

Love is trust... I trust in God instead of man.

Love is giving... to help those who cannot love themselves.

Love is caring... caring about my children and grandchildren.

Love is me... if I cannot love myself, how will I be able to love God,
trust people, and be giving and caring.

—PATRICIA B. | ACADEMY OF HOPE

Love is a walk in the park late at night.

Love is being with the one you want.

Love is my daughters.

Love is my husband.

Love is understanding how others are feeling.

Love is having great friends.

—SELESTINE E. | ACADEMY OF HOPE

*Love is having someone near you to make you feel complete.
Love is a flower that is soft and smells good like a woman.
Love is a walk down the street and having no worries.
Love is like a flower.
Love is like the sun shining and the sky.
Love is like the touch of a woman.
Love is like looking at the water.
Love is like caring for someone.
Love is taking care of my son.
Love is like a gift that God has given me.*



—GEORGE K. | MARSHALL HEIGHTS COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATION



Love is blind.

It will take over your mind.

What you think is love is surely not.

You need to elevate and find.

L is for lovely moments and lonely times at night.

O is for over and over arguments about something that happened last week.

V is for Valentine's Day with lots of hugs and kisses and special time.

E is for everything we've been through for this long period of time.

Love.

—SHAVEEM R. | ARCH



Love is seafood.

Love is fried oysters.

Love is blue crabs from the Chesapeake.

Love is catfish.

Love is salmon.

Love is the water from which the seafood came.

—VIVIENNE M. | MARSHALL HEIGHTS
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATION

Love is nice at times.

Love can break you down like a shotgun.

Love is good all the time, but to have good love
you have to have the right woman to love you.

Love will make you walk in front of moving cars.

Love will make you cry like a baby.

Love will make you smile all the time.

—RAYMOND J. | GOSPEL RESCUE MINISTRIES,
SCHOOL OF TOMORROW

Love is a child's sweet laughter.

Love is a mother's joy.

Love is family sticking together.

Love is a newborn baby's first cry.

Love is unconditional.

Love is two hearts beating as one.

Love is me and you.

—CORNELIA S. | ACADEMY OF HOPE



*Love is watching
my daughter run.*

REGINALD L., ACADEMY OF HOPE

Love is God.

Love is caring about others.

Love is to free your mind.

Love is to write something good.

Love is to think about the universe.

Love is to dream for a good tomorrow.

Love is to make good changes in your life.

Love is to care about the earth.

Love is to imagine that we can do everything we want.

Love is to have a place to live.

Love is to be a good friend.

—MARIBEL G. | ACADEMY OF HOPE



Love is sweet like candy.
Love is straight like an arrow.
Love is good.
Love is like a breath of fresh air.
Love is fresh like a pair of shoes.
Love is like jazz and blues.



—VERNON M. | MARSHALL HEIGHTS COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATION

Love is a book that you have to pen to see what it reads.

Love is true in your heart not your mouth or face.

Love is kind and honest.

Love is the feeling expressed inside of the soul of a human being.

Love is the beauty of a person both inside and outside.

Love is caring, tenderness, touching, happiness, and special treats that indicate true love is deep inside.

—ANN D. | ACADEMY OF HOPE



Where I'm from

For about fourteen years I've been trying to get my high school diploma. I have stopped for life to carry on. But I have not been defeated. Raising children and getting sick has yet to stop me. My goal is to walk across the stage at graduation; that will be one goal. The next goal is to go to college. So what I am saying in a nutshell is: do not give up.

—DEBORAH M. | MARSHALL HEIGHTS COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATION

was born and raised in Washington, D.C. My mother and father were married at that time. I have three brothers and no sister. After I was born, they separated. At that point I was told that my father did not claim me as his child. So he was not part of my life. He was very much in my brother's life though, but not mine. They would not take me anywhere with them which made me feel sad and lonely. My mother remarried my stepfather. He was really the only father I knew. He always shared with others that I was his daughter, and that made me feel a little better. I do believe that growing up I always wanted to be accepted by my father. Still he did not accept me.

So, let me go back. When I started dating, I was looking for older men. I could not understand why. My first boyfriend was ten years older than me and I thought he was the world. I loved the fact that he would tell me what to do. We had two sons together. He stayed in jail so much I thought it was normal to wait for him so that my sons could have their father. After years of waiting, he came home and did not come home to us. Now my two sons are in jail. And I do believe it is a result of my having been fatherless myself. So now I have adopted my grandson and pray that he won't become a statistic.

—DARLENE G. | MARSHALL HEIGHTS COMMUNITY
DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATION





My father died when I was very young so all I had was my mother. I had to teach myself about life and take care of my sister and brother, but I had a problem within myself. I was lonely and lost because I never had a father to teach me how to live the life of a man. So I went to the street to learn.

The older I got the more and more trouble I got in. I dropped out of school. I worried that my brother and sister would end up like me. My mother had a kind spirit and believed she was with God. Still today I ask myself what happened to me coming up in life. I had to learn how to overcome my fear. Seeing my mother go through a lot made me strong in so many ways.

—GEORGE K. | MARSHALL HEIGHTS COMMUNITY
DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATION

I can remember my mom and her not being there and all the hurtful feelings I held inside of me. It tore me up, coming up all alone, with no mother and no father. That made me turn to the streets. All I knew was right and wrong and I really didn't even know that.

—LAKEITHA J. |
ACADEMY OF HOPE

I am seventeen years old and there have been times when things have gotten rough. I didn't have much when I was young, just the basics. That was enough to get me by. I have had family disputes in the past but that was when I was younger and did not know any better. I am much wiser now and have learned to diffuse problems before and after they begin. It is one of the many talents I have.

—VUIDO T. | ARCH

When I awoke this morning,

I thanked God for allowing me to see everything surrounding me. Smelling the aroma of pancakes cooking and then tasting those strawberry pancakes melt in my mouth was delicious.

I heard the birds chirping as I opened up the window to let the sun shine in. As I was going out the door, I got to touch my friend's lips with my own. That was my way of saying having a blessed day.

—CONSTANCE S. | D.C. DEPARTMENT OF
EMPLOYMENT SERVICES, PROJECT EMPOWERMENT

Well, I have a father who doesn't really talk to me.

—ANONYMOUS



Learning about different people and different groups made me aware that there are different cultures. In life, I grew up to learn more about myself and where I fit in.

KEVIN B., GOSPEL RESCUE MINISTRIES/SCHOOL OF TOMORROW

Being born and raised in D.C. was not easy. At the age of five I watched my father leave home and never come back. Then one day, at the age of sixteen, I got a telephone call from Lorton, collect. When I heard the voice I knew it was my dad. I was sort of happy to hear from him, but also disappointed because he had left me and my mom to struggle. Becoming a product of the welfare system and because of that years before this, well, I became a statistic—your dropout, drug boy, and part time stick up man. To this day I think about what impact my father would have had on me as far as where my life is today. Everything on the surface is fine, but I am still searching for some truth about what it takes to be a man. When a father is not involved in your upbringing, you just have to go on opinions.

—LESLIE H. | VIRTUAL ENTERPRISE

I was born on August 31, 1990 out of wedlock to Alethia Y. and Larry J. B. My parents didn't have a place of their own so we lived with my grandmother. Living with my grandmother was good, for the most part. Along with my parents and grandmother were twelve cousins, aunts, and uncles and people who would just spend a night. Living in a drug-infested home, the police were frequent visitors. But nonetheless, my grandmother made sure that we had everything we needed... mostly.

One thing I will say, my house was alive. Everyone knew of us or had heard of us. My mother and father were never home so I took care of my younger brother. My grandmother had other things to worry about, including her health, so I was left to care for my brother. That meant missing school, and repeating the third grade.

—CYNTHIA Y. | ARCH



Our Names are poems

Everlasting love and

Read love will always live

Inside those who are

Kind to those who

Appreciate other feelings.

—ERIKA S. | BRIGHT BEGINNINGS

Nurturing nourishes the soul

Art is a creative expression and should be appreciated.

Talent should flourish and be cared for.

Enthusiasm should be kept for success and so should ambition.

—NATHANIEL W. | D.C. DEPARTMENT OF EMPLOYMENT
SERVICES, PROJECT EMPOWERMENT

Ever sustaining to succeed
Man of honor, respect and religion
Always willing to help others.
Never ending love of mother and respect for life.
Undying respect for my teacher Miss Renee Miller
Elevated spiritually to a higher power
Loving all forsaking none.

—EMANUEL T. | D.C. DEPARTMENT OF EMPLOYMENT SERVICES, PROJECT EMPOWERMENT



Talk to many people

Act with others

Nice to be with

Enjoying life and being patient

Sweet to be with and adorable

Happy to do the job

Amazing and beautiful in everything I do.

—TANESHA A. | KENNEDY INSTITUTE

Just to know I am loved

Everything I think is love

Feeling free with all of my soul

Finding peace as I get old

Really loving the life I live

Even though sometimes I yell

Yet I strive to be the best, love myself and bless the rest.

—JEFFREY H. | D.C. DEPARTMENT OF EMPLOYMENT
SERVICES, PROJECT EMPOWERMENT

Care about everyone's happiness

Always willing to help all who need help

Ready to listen with an open ear

Overflowing with gladness and joy

Love is the key to peace and happiness for all

Yes, we can do this because everyone needs a friend

Never forget...together, one day at a time, my brothers and sisters.

—CAROLYN P. | OFFICE OF THE STATE SUPERINTENDENT
OF EDUCATION, ADULT AND FAMILY EDUCATION

This is our time.

LOUISE T., ACADEMY OF HOPE



Feel free and take your time,
Realize life should shine
Add all the things you do
Never worry about what people think of you
Call on the Lord in need
In life we should all succeed.
Save yourself and in these days and time and never destroy your mind.

—FRANCIS R. | D.C. DEPARTMENT OF EMPLOYMENT SERVICES, PROJECT EMPOWERMENT

Very important to love everyone in peace
And harmony.
Today we must learn to thank God
It is necessary because it is
Forever helpful in one's life
For growth.

—VATIFF H. | D.C. DEPARTMENT OF EMPLOYMENT SERVICES, PROJECT EMPOWERMENT

*Commitment is
Ongoing
No matter what the
Situation becomes
Thank God for
Answering when he does
Never forget he
Comes when you least expect
Everything will be alright.*

—CONSTANCE S. | D.C. DEPARTMENT OF EMPLOYMENT
SERVICES, PROJECT EMPOWERMENT

From
Rubies to Jasper
And
Jade, we all must turn over a stone
In
Love and
Let love
Everyone should love.

—FRAJILLE E. | BRIGHT BEGINNINGS

Destined for Adventure
Alert of Evil
Ready to Love / Ready for the unexpected
Yearn for Love
Loyal to Family / Loyal to Life

—DARYL C. | D.C. DEPARTMENT OF EMPLOYMENT
SERVICES, PROJECT EMPOWERMENT

APPRECIATION

The Office of the State Superintendent of Education appreciates Busboys and Poets and Teaching for Change for providing the venue and books for the popular Claude Brown Writers & Readers Series. Busboys and Poets is a restaurant, bookstore, and gathering place in Washington, D.C. where people can discuss issues of social justice and peace. The Langston Room in Busboys and Poets, combined with books from the progressive bookstore managed by the nonprofit organization Teaching for Change, has provided just the right setting for the reflection and transformation for which the Series is known.

Teaching for Change is a nonprofit organization that promotes social justice in schools through publications, parent organizing, and professional development. Its independent bookstore at Busboys and Poets carries anti-bias, multicultural titles for all ages.



The name Busboys and Poets refers to American poet Langston Hughes, who worked as a busboy at the Wardman Park Hotel in the 1930s, prior to gaining recognition as a poet.

Owner Andy Shallal painted the giant civil rights movement-themed mural, entitled "Peace and Struggle," covering one wall of the Langston Room, the space used for the Claude Brown Writers & Readers Series. Glimpses of the wall appear in the images in this book and you can see how the inspirational space, phenomenal writers, and adult learner insights elevate the educational experience. The mural features the words of Langston Hughes, "Let America be America again / Let it be the dream it used to be."

Busboys and Poets and Teaching for Change have created an inspiring space for adult learners to meet with authors to read, reflect, and write as Langston Hughes once did in the U Street neighborhood.

2008 Guests

Kwame Alexander
Daryl Davis
Esther Iverem
Oni Lasana
Dorothy Phaire
Leonard Pitts, Jr.
Joy Jones, *Moderator*

Partners

Busboys and Poets
www.busboysandpoets.com

Teaching for Change
www.teachingforchange.org

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*Anything is possible as long as you put
your mind to it and state your goal.*

SALLY F., VIRTUAL ENTERPRISE





OFFICE OF THE STATE SUPERINTENDENT OF EDUCATION
ADULT AND FAMILY EDUCATION
51 N STREET, NE
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20002
(202) 741-5531 • osse.dc.gov